Prime Minister.

as requested.

D.J.F. Collings
Duty clerk
28/3/80.

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENERGY
THAMES HOUSE SOUTH
MILLBANK LONDON SW1P 4QJ
01 211 6402

N Sanders Esq
Private Secretary to
The Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1

28 March 1980

Dear Nick,

EKOFISK: ALEXANDER KIELLAND DISASTER

I enclose the report the Prime Minister requested earlier today.

Government action is being co-ordinated by the Department of Trade as the responsible authority for sea search and rescue operations. The Department of Energy is responsible for the regulations governing the certification and survey for UKCS operations of offshore drilling rigs (such as the type involved in the current disaster) as well as fixed offshore installations, and will closely monitor any investigations and recommendations made by the Norwegian authorities.

As you will see from the enclosed report, the legal status of accommodation units on the UKCS has not yet been resolved to industry's complete satisfaction. The Offshore Safety Committee under the chairmanship of Dr Burgoyne has recommended inter alia that this uncertainty should be resolved. In view of the current disaster, my Secretary Of State is confident that a solution will be achieved with the industry without more argument or delay.

I am copying this to Paul Lever (FCO) Stuart Hampson (Trade) and to David Wright (Sir Robert Armstrong Office).

Yours ever,

Denis

Denis Walker
Private Secretary.

EKOFISK: ALEXANDER KIELLAND DISASTER

The cause of the disaster is still unclear. The Alexander Kielland was built in France in 1976 to a well tried French design of semi-submersible exploration drilling rig. It was Norwegian owned and registered, and was being used as an accommodation vessel for workers employed in construction of the Edda platform in the Ekofisk complex.

2. The rescue operation is being co-ordinated by the Norwegian Rescue Centre at Stavanger, with whom the Aberdeen Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre is in constant touch.

3. As at 15.30 hrs. today, there are 133 survivors; 38 bodies have been found; and 53 remain missing. Of the total of 224, 35 are believed to be British Nationals but how many of these have been rescued is unknown. All these figures should, however, be treated with caution in view of the large number of vessels involved in the rescue operation.

4. Two RN vessels, together with RAF Nimrod aircraft and up to 7 civil and military helicopters are actively assisting in the operation at any one time, with a further 18 helicopters standing by. There is a total of 47 vessels in the area, including 3 diving support ships. It is unlikely that more effective support can be provided from UK resources than is already available.

5. The legal status of accommodation vessels on the UKCS has not yet been fully resolved. The Department of Energy has recently taken the view (supported by legal advice) that floating accommodation units, whether converted from drilling rigs or purpose built, have the same legal status as fixed offshore production platforms, and are therefore subject to the Mineral Workings(Offshore Installations) Act 1971, including the Construction and Survey regulations made under it. Owners of such floating accommodation units have therefore been requested to register them in accordance with the Act if they are not already registered as drilling rigs. Several

cont'd.....

EKOFISK: ALEXANDER KIELLAND DISASTER

owners of non-registered accommodation vessels have in fact applied for registration, but the UK Offshore Operators' Association (UKOOA) has nevertheless shown some reluctance to accepting the Department's legal interpretation. The Department is confident of its legal position and has told UKOOA that it is prepared to initiate a test case if necessary, and that it will seek amendment of the 1971 Act so as to include floating accommodation units if the result of such a test case were unfavourable.

6. The Norwegian authorities have already refused to allow another rig of the Pentagon type to leave a Norwegian port. There are three similar rigs currently working on the UKCS (none, however, essentially as accommodation units). Department is making arrangements for each to be given an independent survey in the immediate future, although all of them have passed such surveys during the last eight months and have valid certificates of fitness.

7. The Ekofisk incident has had a marked effect on Norway's oil production. Production from the whole of the Ekofisk complex has had to be cut back from 500,000 barrels/day to just over half that quantity.

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

28 March 1980

Nick MS - PA

10 DOWNING STREET

Latest information on oil-rig disaster, from Energy:—

149 rescued

28 recovered dead

53 still missing.

18 Britons have not yet been accounted for.

The divers are still working on the rig. There is a lot of wreckage. They don't think there will be any further survivors.

Information relayed to Chequers for P.M.'s info.

Steve

28.2.

Approved: Told Paul
Lever to despatch 1335 28/3

✓ C.C Foreign Office
(P. Lever)

DRAFT MESSAGE FOR THE PRIME MINISTER TO SEND TO THE NORWEGIAN PRIME MINISTER

I am writing on behalf of Her Majesty's Government to express our deepest distress and sympathy with the Norwegian people in the tragic loss of life in the Alexander Kielland disaster. We are providing and will continue to provide every possible assistance in the rescue operations which are in hand and if there is any further help which we can give we stand instantly ready to give it. Your country shares with ours the problems and dangers inherent in the winning of oil and gas from the North Sea, and there has always been the closest co-operation and understanding between us. The importance of this close relationship to both our countries has never been more clearly shown than it has today.

Her Majesty's Government extends to your country and to the families and relatives of those who have sacrificed their lives or suffered injury, its deepest sympathy in the tragic loss and distress which they have suffered.

(His Excellency Mr Odvar Nordli)

cc FCO (P. Lever)
Told P. Lever to despatch immediately 1400 SH

MESSAGE FROM THE PRIME MINISTER AND CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NORWAY: FRIDAY, 28 MARCH 1980

Dear Prime Minister,

It is with deep shock that we heard while we were meeting together today the news of the terrible events that happened to the Alexander Keilland oil rig last night.

We wish to express our deepest condolences to the families of all those who perished in the accident. We sincerely hope that the continuing rescue efforts will be successful.

Please convey our deepest sympathy to the relatives of those involved.

Margaret Thatcher, Helmut Schmidt.

To Mr. Odvar Nordli, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Norway

10 DOWNING STREET

Note at 1310 hrs.

N. Gaffin told me that the World at one categorically stated that the P.M had sent a message to the Norwegian P.M re the Oil rig Disaster.

Clive has told me that the P.M has not yet cleared the text to Norway. They have also got a text for a Joint Schmidt/Thatcher

Message which they are working on.

Whichever message (or both) goes, we will be informed.

Richard.
28/3.

140 missing as oil rig capsizes in North Sea gale

At least 140 oil rig workers were missing last night after gales capsized a North Sea accommodation platform with 208 people on board. Fifty people were trapped in the rig's cinema as it broke up. Thirteen ships were diverted to the scene, midway between England and Denmark, and RAF and Norwegian helicopters plucked more than 50 oil workers to safety. Most of those on board were Norwegian.

Fifty trapped in deck cinema

By Staff Reporters

An international rescue operation was under way in the North Sea last night after an oil accommodation rig with 208 people on board capsized about 180 miles east of Newcastle upon Tyne and was reported to be breaking up.

At least 140 workers, most of them Norwegians, were reported missing. About 50 were said to be trapped in the rigs cinema as it broke up.

Some British catering staff and some Americans were among those on board the rig.

RAF and Norwegian rescue aircraft and 13 ships went to the scene. A rescue vessel with 25 men on board was reported missing in the area which was swept by 60 knot winds.

Late last night the RAF said 55 people had been picked up by its helicopters, transferred to ships in the area or taken to Stavanger. Conditions were "poor" with a force 10 gale and poor visibility.

An RAF Nimrod aircraft equipped with searchlights and flares reached the area last night. All Norwegian oil rigs on the Norwegian side of the North Sea stopped work and concentrated on the rescue operation.

Statoil, the Norwegian oil company, said the platform capsized about 6.30 pm, when one of five pontoon legs on the semi-submersible rig, described as a "floatel", broke off. "The unit then capsized", the spokesman said. Later the rig was said to be listing at 40 to 50 degrees.

On its side with two legs in the air

The rig, the Alexander Kielland, was a construction base for the Edda platform in the Ekofisk field run by Phillips Petroleum, an American company.

The rig was said to be on its side with two legs in the air, still floating.

A Phillips spokesman in Oslo said: "The rig is now bottom-up after capsizing completely and dropping people into the sea."

Phillips said divers had gone to the scene. Survivors brought to the Ekofisk field hospital were injured, the spokesman said. He believed that one of the rigs air-filled steel legs broke, probably hit by a strong wave.

A Mayday message was flashed from the rig at 6.30 and relayed to the Norwegian rescue centre in Stavanger. The RAF was alerted and two Sea King helicopters were "scrambled" from Boulmer in Northumberland and Coltishall in Norfolk, together with five from the Norwegian bases.

Thirteen ships were reported to be moving towards the rig as it wallowed in huge seas roughly half-way between Britain and Norway. RAF helicopters were over the rig by about 9.30 last night, and reported seeing survivors in the sea in lifejackets and some in life rafts.

The crew of one RAF helicopter pulled five people out of the water.

The Norwegian rescue centre at Stavanger sent out radio appeals to all available helicopter crews to fly to the disaster area. The appeal asked especially for helicopters with medical equipment.

British and Norwegian rescue helicopters were called back to base late last night as weather conditions worsened. Earlier they had reported seeing bodies floating under water.

Six miles from centre of the field

Statoil said the rig would have been equipped with self-powered lifeboats and was about 6 miles from the centre of the Ekofisk field. It was possible some of the survivors would try and reach other fixed platforms in the area, he said.

The reason for the collapse of one of the massive legs on the rig was not known and the nationality of those on board was not available.

The rig, on hire from Stavanger Drilling, was built in France and was about five or six years old. It was due to complete its share of the contract work on the construction of the Edda platform within a few days and leave the area, Statoil said.

The Alexander Kielland is a semi-submersible platform, not unlike an oil rig in appearance. It rests on the sea bottom on five huge pontoons. No oil drilling equipment was on board, the platform being fitted out as living accommodation for the oilmen, with kitchens, leisure rooms, and sleeping accommodation.

The capsize of the rig is the second disaster to strike the Ekofisk field. In 1977 there was a blow-out on the Bravo platform which led to an emergency evacuation. Mr Red Adair, the colourful Texan firefighter, was called in to stop the flow of oil.

In the wake of that accident the British Government set up a committee to investigate North Sea safety procedures. Its report was published two weeks ago.

All rigs and platforms in both the Norwegian and British sectors of the North Sea have lifeboats which will withstand the worst weather. Liferafts are also provided but exposure is the major hazard to anyone in the water.

There is also a safety ship, usually a trawler, on constant station around all platforms and rigs, but in heavy weather it would have difficulties in picking up lost crew.

The capsized platform was used as a "hotel" for oil workers resting from jobs on other rigs in the Ekofisk field. It has kitchens, leisure rooms and sleeping quarters.

The Ekofisk complex of fields is being developed in four phases. The Edda platform is part of the fourth phase and it started production in December. The accommodation rig would be needed because of the extra work required at the start of production to get output up to its peak.

Accommodation rigs, which can be moved away from a static platform, are used because once production is under way and running at full stretch the need for workers falls dramatically.

These rigs are usually converted from semi-submersibles used for drilling. The drilling rig is taken off and replaced with accommodation units.

Moored to the sea by tensioned anchors

They are moored to the sea bed by tensioned anchors and linked to a fixed platform by a bridge. In heavy storms, accommodation submersibles move away from the production platform to avoid any possibility of collision.

Semi-submersibles can move under their own power, but would not do so in storm conditions. They float on two pontoons with legs supporting the main deck on which drilling rigs or accommodation units are positioned.

Computer-controlled ballasting similar to that which allows a submarine to dive below the sea level allows them to keep relatively stable. They can alter their position in the water depending on whether they are stationary or on the move between locations.

Phillips has one of the most advanced rescue ships in the oil exploration area, a semi-submersible vessel designed to act in the worst conditions. Its main purposes, however, is for fire prevention and it will be of limited use for the kind of operation required last night.

The Times 28 March 1980

NORTH SEA OIL RIG (COLLAPSE)

Mr. Clinton Davis: I wish to ask the following question, of which I have given private notice, to the Secretary of State for Trade——

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I say, for the information of the House, that the hon. Gentleman addressed his question to the Secretary of State for Trade, but it has been transferred to the Secretary of State for Energy?

Mr. Davis: I wish to ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the rescue operations arising out of the collapse of the Norwegian oil rig, the "Alexander Kielland", in the wake of which at least 120 oil rig workers were missing, including many Britons.

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. David Howell): I am sure that the whole House will wish to join the Government in expressing deep regret at the accident involving the Norwegian accommodation rig, "Alexander Kielland", in the Ekofisk field in the Norwegian sector of the North Sea. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is conveying her concern and sympathy to the Norwegian Prime Minister, and I am sending a similar message to the Norwegian Energy Minister, offering all possible assistance.

As to the United Kingdom's part in the rescue operation, I understand that three Nimrods are in use, that four Sea King helicopters are available, and that three Royal Navy ships are assisting in the area.

No firm figures are yet available of the numbers or nationalities of the casualties, but my latest information is that 133 people have been rescued, 28 bodies have been recovered and 69 persons are still missing.

As I have said, we are offering the Norwegian Government all possible help, and we shall keep a close watch on the outcome of any inquiries that are initiated.

Mr. Clinton Davis: The whole House will wish to join the right hon. Gentleman and the Government in expressing deep regret at this appalling tragedy, which has already taken such a huge toll in life and has created such desperate anxiety among the relatives of those many who are missing.

May I also pay a tribute, in which I am sure the whole House will wish to join, to those who have been engaged in the massive rescue operation, in the most gruelling and appalling weather conditions, an operation that has had a remarkable success already?

Can the Secretary of State say at this stage whether there is any hope for those who appear still to be trapped in the accommodation platform? Perhaps it is too early for him to say whether the Government will join the Norwegian Government, as did the previous Government in relation to the Ekofisk disaster, in carrying out a full inquiry into all aspects of the matter. That would involve the Department of Trade, which would be responsible for the rescue operations, as well as his own Department.

Will the right hon. Gentleman consider making a further statement as soon as he thinks that it would be practicable—that is, that it could yield some information to the House as a whole, both about the reasons for the appalling tragedy and the steps that he and his Norwegian colleagues, and others within both Governments, will wish to take in the wake of what has happened?

Mr. Howell: I echo the hon. Gentleman's sentiments and underline what he said about the bravery of those operating in the North Sea in the appalling conditions that prevail there at all times, and especially those now engaged in the rescue operation.

It is too early for me to be able to comment further on the question of rescue or the number of lives lost. We are receiving information all the time, but it is too early to say any more.

As to inquiries, I understand that the Norwegian Government are urgently considering these matters. It is a responsibility that lies in Norwegian waters, and our Government's responsibilities must be viewed accordingly. As I have said, we intend to keep closely in touch with any developments resulting from an inquiry and, obviously, to learn from them.

With regard to a further statement, I shall of course make available all information as is appropriate and in the best form for the House and the general public.

in Bucharest in 1934. In recent years most developing countries have established programmes aimed at limiting population growth. It is estimated that 95 per cent. of the Third world population lives in more than 60 countries that are adopting such policies.

The programmes vary widely in effectiveness. Several countries, such as China, South Korea, Thailand, Indonesia, Chile, Columbia and, more recently, Mexico, having achieved significant success in reducing fertility rates. Others, including Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Egypt, have made little progress, while sub-Sahara and Africa have barely begun to face the problem. There are still about 317 million couples with no access to family planning information. It is vital that they should be assisted to make a reasonable choice.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe said, the most important factors are political will and determination at the top levels of government in the countries concerned, together with effective administration, properly trained field workers and medical staff, and some sort of community involvement and enthusiasm.

External assistance has played—and will continue to play—a vital role. The United States of America has, needless to say, been far in the lead, both in providing bilateral aid and in supporting multilateral and private organisations. The main donor programmes at 1977 figures show that the United States contributed more than $140 million; the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, $78 million; and the International Planned Parenthood Federation, $51 million. Norway, Sweden, Japan, Canada and Germany all contributed, the United Kingdom gave $7 million, and France and Italy gave negligible assistance.

Measured against the magnitude of the problem, current global levels of assistance in population matters are very small. They amount to only about 2 per cent. of total aid flows.

It is vital for the success of world development and for the survival of the human race in anything like tolerable conditions that people everywhere should have access to information on, and the means of regulating the size of their families if they so desire. All aid programmes should include population elements. Research into reproductive physiology and contraceptive development must be stepped up. The need for support is urgent. The United Nations Fund for Population activities can now meet only two-thirds of the requests that it receives.

The international conference of parliamentarians on population and development, jointly sponsored by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, which I attended in Colombo last August, called on the world community to increase international assistance.

It being Eleven o'clock, Mr. SPEAKER *interrupted the proceedings, pursuant to Standing Order No.* 5 (*Friday sittings*).

Mr. Emery: Will my right hon. Friend assure the families that have suffered such a tragic loss that the regrets and condolences of Back Benchers on both sides of the House go out to them?

Will my right hon. Friend answer three short questions? First, will he give the House an assurance that he will ensure that there is an immediate inspection of any flotation rigs operating in the British section of the North Sea? Although the rig in question was being used as an accommodation rig, I understand that it was initially a drilling rig.

Secondly, can my right hon. Friend, who has said that we shall co-operate with the Norwegians in any inquiry, assure us that he will ensure that the House is kept informed of the outcome of that inquiry? That may mean that some translation will be necessary.

Thirdly, can my right hon. Friend yet give any estimate to the House and the nation of what the tragedy may mean in terms of production from the Ekofisk field?

Mr. Howell: Perhaps I may answer my hon. Friend's questions in reverse order. It is too early to give an estimate of the kind for which he asked. The answer to his second question is that of course I shall keep the House fully informed about the developments and implications.

My hon. Friend asked first about immediate inspection of installations. There are similar types of installation operating on the United Kingdom continental shelf. My Department took steps last year to start classifying those installations as coming under the controls of the existing offshore safety legislation. As they come under those controls, they are covered by the necessary inspection, requiring the necessary safety standards. We are pressing ahead with that. Clearly, there are lessons to be learnt from the tragedy that will enable us to carry forward that work more effectively.

Dr. Owen: On behalf of the Opposition, I express our deepest regret and our sympathy with our Norwegian friends, the Norwegian Government and particularly the relatives of those who have lost their lives in this most tragic episode.

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that we also fully support all the efforts made by the United Kingdom to help in the rescue operation? We cannot allow a boundary line in the North Sea in any way to impede the need for the fullest and closest co-operation. North Sea safety is the responsibility of us all. We all know that we would have similar support from the Norwegian people.

When does the right hon. Gentleman hope that it will be possible for the House —in the light of this disaster, which only underlines the hazards of North Sea oil development—to discuss the report of Dr. J. H. Burgoyne and his colleagues, Cmnd. 7866, "Offshore Safety"? In particular, will he give careful consideration to the minority report on some of the aspects of safety? I hope that it is possible that on both sides of the House we can reach agreement on the recommendations in the report. The minority report contains a strong argument that needs to be given very careful consideration. A Department ought not to hold the sole responsibility for safety in that area in which it is most concerned.

This is an opportunity for the House to turn its attention to the need for safety in our own sector of North Sea oil and to be reminded, as we all are, of the great risks taken on our behalf by people working in the North Sea to get oil and gas for this country.

Mr. Howell: I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for the views that he has expressed and for the reinforcement that he gives to the feelings that we all have about this great tragedy and loss of life, and towards those who have been bereaved. He is absolutely right to call attention to the Burgoyne report, which has very recently been published and which contains some useful and valuable views on the whole question of how offshore safety can be reinforced and constantly improved.

My Department and the Government are looking carefully and deeply at the Burgoyne report and considering its implications. The right hon. Gentleman is right to say that there are in it both majority and minority views on the question of co-ordination of responsibility for safety. These are always difficult questions as between different agencies and Departments. I take note of the right hon. Gentleman's views. I am sure that when the appropriate consideration

[Mr. Howell.]

has been given by the Government, and when other interested parties have had time to consider the full implications of the report, there will be a wish for the matter to be more widely debated. The form that the debate takes and the time of this House are, of course, matters for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, but I recognise the right hon. Gentleman's concern and underline what he said about the value of the report and the importance of building upon it.

Mr. Donald Stewart: I associate my party colleague and myself, and the British-Norwegian group in the House, with the expressions of regret and sympathy concerning the disaster. Can the Secretary of State at this stage give any indication of when a full casualty list will be available? Are there any accommodation rigs of this kind, with upwards of 200 men, being used in the same way in the sector of the North Sea that comes under his Department?

Mr. Howell: I am afraid that it is too early to give the full details of casualties. As I said earlier, the figures are not even known fully on the spot and are only just coming through.

I cannot give the right hon. Gentleman precise figures of the numbers in accommodation units of this kind, but there are similar types in use. It is the pentagon design of semi-submersible. There are similar types of structure on the United Kingdom continental shelf. In answer to an earlier question, I indicated that as from last year we have been taking steps to classify them and bring them fully under the offshore safety controls which are necessary to ensure their full safety in operation.

Mr. Russell Johnston: Is the Minister aware that we very much associate ourselves with the sympathies that he has expressed over this ghastly accident? Can he say whether, as I have been told, the rig is owned by BP? Can he say whether bringing similar kinds of rigs under the safety regulations to which he has just referred in reply to the right hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Stewart) would have made any difference in this case, since I understand that the Norwegian regulations are more stringent in these respects than ours?

Does the Minister agree that the dominant lesson of this accident is that it appears to be the case that these dreadful disasters happen despite the fact that we are told again and again that it is impossible for them to happen? Does he agree that it is a most chilling reminder of the fallibility of our technology?

Mr. Howell: I understand that it is a Phillips-owned rig, but I would need to confirm that. There could be joint ownership, or a pattern of ownership, which I would need to confirm when I have more details.

It is a fact that the Norwegian regulations are different from ours, and the Burgoyne report has something to say on their different characteristics, one of which, as the report suggests, is that they are more detailed. Whether that necessarily means that they are more or less effective is almost impossible to judge. Nevertheless, one must constantly examine and compare to see what is the best arrangement.

Obviously, offshore safety is of paramount importance to us, and there is a constant need to upgrade and improve. Indeed, I think that the purpose of my predecessor in setting up the Burgoyne committee was to find ways in which that could be carried forward. The lessons of this tragedy, and what we can draw from the wisdom of the Burgoyne committee, provide an opportunity to make comparisons with Norwegian regulations, so that we can see whether any are better than ours and which are of less use to us.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall call those hon. Members who have been rising in their place, and then we shall resume the debate.

Mr. Lawrence: Does not this appalling disaster highlight the vulnerability of the rigs? Is my right hon. Friend satisfied with the degree of protection that the rigs receive? Will he give particular attention to that aspect when he comes to consider what future measures are necessary?

Mr. Howell: One can never be fully satisfied with arrangements and operations under what are inherently very dangerous and risky conditions, so it is necessary

for there to be constant pressure for improvement and upgrading. That will certainly continue, and that is the view that I offer to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Dalyell: As one whose constituency contains the Hound Point terminal, may I express horror at the formidable problems being faced?

This is not the time for instant comment, but may I ask whether an assessment is being set in motion of the problems of major disaster procedure in the North Sea? Even after a matter of days, let alone weeks, people tend in their minds, naturally enough, to distort what has happened. Are steps being taken to set in motion here and now an assessment of major disaster procedures?

Mr. Howell: Major disaster procedures in the North Sea are under constant regular review. In a sense, when a disaster happens it is a reminder that they should be. Sadly, it was too late in the case under consideration. What has happened is a sombre warning and reminder of the appallingly dangerous conditions in which people work in the North Sea in extracting oil. It reinforces the need, which is already fully recognised, to keep our precedures, in facing major North Sea disasters of all kinds, constantly up to date, as they are.

Mr. Emery: I thank you for calling me again, Mr. Speaker, and thank my right hon. Friend for his answers to some of my earlier questions. He did not answer one question that is of major importance. New information has come to light about the disaster in terms of a leakage in the flotation chamber. Will my right hon. Friend order that, in the few semi-submersibles in the British sector, immediate inspections are made of the flotation chambers? If he does not have the power to do that, will he request the operating companies to make such an inspection, so that an assurance can be given to those working on the platforms that every thing is in order?

Mr. Howell: We first have to establish the precise nature of the disaster. We have reports of the kind to which my hon. Friend has rightly referred. On that basis we must, of course, ensure that inspections and safety standards are fully maintained, so that neither that nor any other kind of fault or potential danger of fracture exists in similar installations on the United Kingdom side.

The powers exist where the installations are classified and come under the Mineral Workings (Offshore Installations) Act 1971. Within those powers we act, and will continue to act, in the way that my hon. Friend wishes. It would be wrong not to do so. Although the position in the North Sea of all installations of this accommodation kind is known, the full classification of all of them under the existing safety legislation is not complete. It has been a matter of debate with the owners and operators as to how much classification there should be. These are precisely the issues raised in the Burgoyne report. We must work to balance the overriding needs of safety with the avoidance of so much control and detail that operation becomes impossible. Obviously, one would defeat the other. I hope that that satisfies my hon. Friend.

Mr. Cohen: Whilst joining in the expressions of regret, concern and sympathy, may I, as the father of a son working on the North-Sea rigs as a geologist, say that I can imagine the feelings of the parents of those concerned? I welcome the pressure that has been exerted by hon. Members on both sides of the House and the assurances given by the Minister that there will be a full investigation into all safety aspects on the rigs. I appeal to him to expedite that investigation as quickly as possible.

Mr. Howell: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's intervention, particularly in view of his personal knowledge of this matter through his family. The question of safety standards and inspection is a constant matter in the North Sea, and it is carried out to the highest standards at all times. A hideous disaster, such as this, is a reminder that these things are necessary. Inspection and the maintenance of safety standards go on, have been going on, and will continue to go on to the highest standards consummate with the requirement of the immensely dangerous conditions in the North Sea.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (BRANDT REPORT)

Question again proposed.

11.21 am

Mr. Goodlad: I was saying that the Colombo declaration called on the world community to increase its international assistance for population matters from an annual level of approximately £400 million to £1 billion by 1984.

I conclude by commenting on the Government's response. My hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development—the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Marten)—in his statement to the House on 20 February, said that we shall need to look critically at our expenditure on multilateral aid programmes. I trust that he will do so, because they are not adequate. To the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, for example, the Government initially pledged a £4 million contribution in 1979, but this was subsequently reduced to £2 million. One reason was that the fund had unallocated resources carried over from previous years. That condition will not prevail in 1980, when it is estimated that the fund will have a $20 million deficit, together with requests, pending funding decisions, that will require substantial additional resources. I hope that the Government will respond positively, at least in this area, and play their proper part in supporting the fund.

I also hope that a higher proportion of total aid will be tied to population projects. Out of a total of over £700 million given in overseas aid, less than 1 per cent. has been tied to such projects. As my noble Friend Lord Vernon said in another place, aid to a country that is taking no steps to curb population growth is, like as not money down the drain.

I also think that the Government have a responsibility to educate people to the enormity of the crisis with which the world is threatened so that they are more prepared to will the means of its alleviation, if not its solution. I do not think that people fully appreciate the implications of the doubling of the world's population within a generation.

The late Mr. Reginald Maudling was fond of saying that there is a rhythm in politics. There is also a rhythm in the life cycle of a Government. There is a period during which they chart their course and retain the initiative. Then there is usually a period when the momentum begins to run down, when they are afflicted by adverse and unforseen circumstances, and they stagger from compromise to compromise and crisis to crisis. Happily, we are still in the first phase—and long may it continue.

In the wake of the Rhodesian settlement and the response to the Afghan crisis, I think that our prestige in the Third world is as high as it has been for some time. I hope that we shall hear from my hon. Friend today that the Government are determined, with the implacability for which they are respected, to commit themselves to safeguarding the future of our children by playing a leading part in moving our Allies and friends in the direction indicated by the Brandt report.

When faced with distant threats of future problems of this nature it is tempting to say that we shall cross that bridge when we come to it. In this case, such an approach is not an option. The bridge will have been swept away long since on an irresistible tide, carying with it the prospects of a reasonable life for our children and grandchildren.

11.25 am

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, Central): I join those right hon. and hon. Members who have congratulated the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James) on initiating this debate today. I admire his courage in doing so, in view of the Government's expenditure paper yesterday.

I take issue with the hon. Gentleman on one point that he raised. He said that this was not a question of development aid and assistance. I suggest that this is very much a question of development aid and assistance, and I shall come to that point later.

We welcome the hon. Gentleman's initiative, but this debate should not be taken as a substitute for a full debate in the House, with responsible Members of the Cabinet taking part, after perhaps having had the benefit of reading this debate, and announcing their decision to the House—a decision that has to be announced not only before the United